



# Thomas De Quincey: British Rhetoric's Romantic Turn (Rhetoric in the Modern Era)

*Lois Peters Agnew*

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This wide-ranging volume gives proper attention to the views on rhetoric and style set forth by British literary figure Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859), whose contributions to the history of rhetoric are often overlooked. Lois Peters Agnew presents an overview of this theorist's life and provides cultural context for his time and place, with particular emphasis on the significance of his rhetoric as both an alternative strain of rhetorical history and a previously unrealized example of rhetoric's transformation in nineteenth-century Britain.

Agnew presents an extensive discussion of De Quincey's ideas on rhetoric, his theory and practice of conversation, his theory of style and its role in achieving rhetoric's dialogic potential, and his strategic use of humor and irony in such works as *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Synthesizing previous treatments of De Quincey's rhetoric and connecting his unusual perspectives on language to the biographical details of his life, Agnew helps readers understand his intellectual development while bringing to light the cultural contexts that prompted radical changes in the ways nineteenth-century British intellectuals conceived of the role of language and the imagination in public and private discourse.

Agnew presents an alternative vision of rhetoric that departs from many common assumptions about rhetoric's civic purpose and offers insights into the topic of rhetoric and technological change. The result is an accessible and thorough explanation of De Quincey's complex ideas on rhetoric and the first work to fully show the reach of his ideas across multiple texts written during his lifetime.

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